



# THE MEADOWLARK



A newsletter for those involved with the Glacial Habitat Restoration Area

Volume 1, Issue 1

Summer 2000

## New Biologists Hired to Work in the GHRA

By Tim Lizotte

### WDNR Wildlife Biologist-Oshkosh

The past year saw many changes sweep through the GHRA program, including the hiring of four new biologists and the relocation of one longtime HRA'er. We survived a complete personnel turnover and are now operating at full strength. Eric Lobner, Brenda Hill, Brian Glenzinski and myself were hired to replace the vacancies created by the relocation of Ellen Barth, Pete Engman, and most recently Mark Randall. Mark accepted the Fond du Lac Co. Wildlife Biologist position and migrated north to Oshkosh where he set up shop in the cubicle next to mine. Fortunately for me (and maybe unfortunately for him) I plan on taking full advantage of his vast expanse of prairie restoration knowledge.

Brenda and Eric are stationed at Horicon, and Brian will shuttle between Horicon and Oshkosh through his duties as the Wetland Habitat Coordinator.

Additionally, Tim Connolly, Steve Krueger, and Jake Fries have been hired as wildlife technicians to work in the GHRA for the upcoming year. They bring a wealth of experience in biology, habitat management, and equipment operation to the project.

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## Stewardship 2000

A Fund for the Future

By Eric Lobner

*WDNR Wildlife Biologist-Horicon*

In 1990, the Wisconsin Legislature created the 10-year, \$250 million Stewardship Fund to purchase land for conservation and recreation. In the fall of 1999, the Wisconsin Legislature again reinforced the importance of conservation by renewing the Stewardship Program for \$460 million – that's \$46 million each year until 2010. This money is specifically earmarked to help preserve, restore and enhance wetlands, grasslands, and other wildlife habitat around the state.

What does this mean for the Glacial Habitat Restoration Area? It could mean great things! In the past, this fund has been the driving force behind the GHRA's public land and easement acquisition programs, contributing \$11,150,000 through fiscal year 1999. Although the Stewardship Program will continue, its structure has changed. In the past, there were 12 categories with the GHRA having its own annual allocation. In the new program, the original 12 categories have been consolidated down to one category resulting in increased competition for the funding. Although there will be increased competition, the GHRA remains one of the priority projects for the wildlife management bureau and it is expected that our funding will remain at or above previous levels.

The Stewardship Program has provided exceptional opportunities in the past and will continue to do so in the future. The citizens and wildlife populations, as well as the rural landscape in general, should be extremely thankful and appreciative of the opportunities that this program presents. With this additional appropriation, the future looks bright for sustainable wildlife populations long into the future.❖

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# Biologist Biographies

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**Eric:** Eric grew up in Auburndale, WI Brady Bunch style with 4 sisters and 6 brothers, of which he is the youngest. He attended the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP) and graduated in December of 1994 with a degree in Wildlife

Biology. Eric began his career with the DNR at Mead Wildlife Area in 1994 where he worked on wildlife habitat management. His travels then took him to the Oshkosh and Appleton offices where he worked with private landowners to restore wetlands and grasslands. He then spent a year at Horicon in the GHRA program as the Wetland Habitat Coordinator. At this point Eric left the field for the streets of Madison and became the Assistant Upland Ecologist for the DNR where he coordinated the statewide management of the pheasant, turkey, and sharptail grouse programs (if you didn't get a turkey permit you know who to blame). Eric accepted his permanent position with the GHRA in March of 1999. He and his wife Christy just built a house in Fall River and are expecting their first child in September. His hobbies used to include hunting of all types, fishing, canoeing, and biking, but will now include diaper changing, and late night feedings. Good Luck Eric and Christy!

**Tim:** Tim grew up in Easthampton, MA and earned his Bachelor's degree in Wildlife Biology at the University of Massachusetts in 1994. After graduation he accepted a job working for the Minnesota DNR as a Wildlife Research Technician studying black bears, wolves, and white-tailed deer for 1 year. After this job ended, Tim enrolled at UWSP and began work on his Master's Degree. Tim's thesis research examined the feeding habits, nutritional ecology, and population dynamics of the reintroduced elk herd in Northern WI. He graduated in 1998 and was hired as an Limited Term Employee (LTE) with the WDNR stationed at Horicon and Oshkosh doing wildlife habitat work and private lands management for a year until he accepted his current position in March of 1999. 1999 brought many personal changes to Tim's life with a new job, new wife (there was no old one), new house, and new dog. Tim and his wife Shelly purchased a 100 year-old farmhouse in Eldorado Township on 5 acres. Year 2000 will see the addition of 30 chickens and turkeys to the mini farm. Next year, bacon?

**Brian:** Brian grew up chasing trout and pheasants in Rochester, MN and claims to be a Viking fan (not sure why anyone would admit this?). He then did what all-good WDNR biologists do and entered the Wildlife Biology program at UWSP in 1991. Brian was active in rock climbing and rugby until he graduated in 1995. In 1996 he entered the LTE ranks with the WDNR at Bong Recreation Area in Kansasville where he worked with natural area management, pheasants, and deer. Brian assisted with the Big Muskego Lake Restoration which stimulated his interest in wetland restoration and management. Then he took a 1-year position managing and analyzing data from old growth forests, agricultural ecosystems, and wildlife surveys for the WDNR Research Center in Monona. Looking to get back to the field, he accepted a position coordinating wetland restorations for the Federal Government and WDNR in Manitowoc in August 1999. We lured Brian away to manage the wetland program of the GHRA in April of 2000.

**Brenda:** Brenda hails from DeSoto, WI on the banks of the Mississippi River. Along with the rest of the staff, she attended UWSP and graduated in 1993 with a B.S. in Wildlife Biology. She also has WDNR experience and worked in Madison on aging techniques for wild turkeys, in northern WI on the relationships of wolves to highways, and most recently, for 6 years as the Assistant Waterfowl Biologist in Madison. Her duties included coordinating waterfowl surveys and harvest reports. Concurrent with that position Brenda began her Master's Degree project testing a natural food additive that has the potential to decrease goose populations in urban areas by reducing the hatchability of eggs (important work!). Personally, Brenda resides in Madison with her Labrador Retrievers and enjoys dog training, hiking, and hunting waterfowl.❖



**GHRA Staff (from left): Brenda, Eric, Tim, Brian**

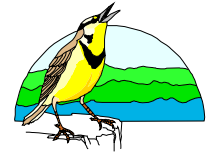
## FEATURED EASEMENT

Landowner: Tom and Julie Berger  
Location: Rushford Township, Winnebago Co.  
Sections 16 & 21  
Size: 125 Acres

Tom and Julie entered their land into the GHRA program in 1997. The property is an irregular shaped piece of land consisting of 50 acres of upland and 75 acres of marsh/swamp. The uplands are on the west-side of the property and the east side slopes down in elevation to become part of the Fox River flood-plain. The property has approximately 1,450 feet of frontage on the north side of the Fox River. This area is excellent waterfowl habitat and is a walleye pike spawning marsh. The GHRA program has restored two wetlands on the property; one ½ acre scrape project, and the one 3.5 acre dike site. Both wetland projects receive heavy waterfowl use and are excellent habitat improvements. Twenty-five acres of the adjacent upland was seeded to native prairie last year, and the remaining 25 will be seeded this year. The prairie will provide secure nesting cover for the numerous birds using the area. ♦

## Species Profile

By Brenda Hill  
*Wildlife Biologist-Horicon*



### Meadowlark

The official logo for the GHRA is the Meadowlark. There are two species of meadowlark, eastern and western, both of which are found in Wisconsin Grasslands.

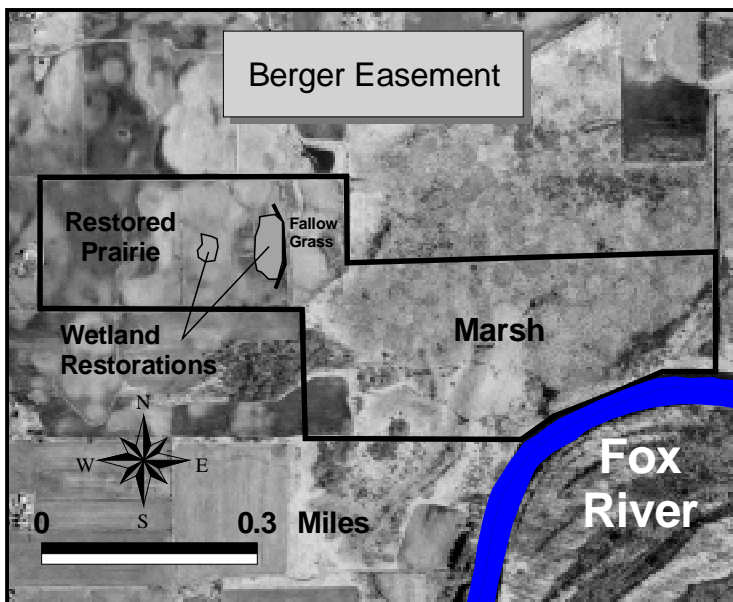
Our “poster bird” was chosen to acknowledge the GHRA, not only as a pheasant and waterfowl program, but to emphasize the importance of grassland songbirds too!

The meadowlark is a bird of open spaces, found in meadows (as their name suggests), pastures and prairies. However, they are not larks as their name implies, but rather they belong to the “blackbird” family that includes the bobolinks, red-winged, yellow-headed and brewer’s blackbirds, the common grackle, the brown-headed cowbird, and orioles.

The male and female meadowlarks have a yellow chest with a black v-shaped stripe on the breast along with a dark colored head stripe. Other characteristics include a height of approximately 9 inches, a long slender bill and short tail with a patch of white on each side.

Meadowlarks winter in southern U.S. to Brazil, Cuba, and central Mexico. The migrant meadowlarks arrive back in Wisconsin during the spring months of March to mid-April. Then, May through mid-July, the female will begin to lay her first of two clutches of 3-5 eggs. Eggs are white marked with brown spots. She incubates the eggs until they hatch which takes 13-15 days. After hatch, both the male and female feed the young until they fledge the nest in approximately 12 days. Nests and young face the threat of destruction from mowing cultivated fields. Other causes of concern for this species are habitat loss, habitat fragmentation and predation.

The meadowlark is a true friend to the farmer. It always feeds on the ground where it consumes great quantities of insects, including grasshoppers, beetles, and caterpillars and also many kinds of noxious wild seeds. ♦



# NAWCA Grant Provides Opportunity for Wetland Restoration

By Brian Glenzinski

*Wildlife Biologist-Horicon*

Thanks to a grant from the North American Waterfowl Conservation Act (NAWCA) there is a great opportunity to restore wetlands within the GHRA. This grant provided funds for a wetland biologist and the dollars necessary to do the restoration work. The goal of this grant is to restore wetlands that had been degraded by drainage or other alterations. This money **cannot** be used to dig fishponds or alter in tact wetlands. This is a two year grant ending in January of 2002.

The benefits of restoring wetlands are extensive. We tend to focus on the wildlife values; providing brood water for waterfowl, winter cover for pheasants, habitat for amphibians, and nesting cover for many non-game birds, as well as a water source for all other wildlife. But wetlands also serve to improve water quality by removing sediment and nutrients from the water. They help to control flooding by storing runoff in storm events. And we cannot forget the view from the back porch overlooking a beautiful restored wetland.

Planting adjacent uplands to native prairie is the perfect compliment to a restored wetland. We strive to get four acres of upland for every acre of wetland. This provides nesting cover for waterfowl and habitat for other upland species. It provides the cover necessary to complete the life cycle of many amphibians and other wildlife, which overwinter in the wetlands and nest in the uplands. This grass cover also buffers the wetland from nutrients and sediment, which can seriously impact water quality and vegetation.

Both wetland and upland restorations can be cost-shared. The percentages depend on the level of commitment from the land-owner and the cost per acre of the restoration. There are 10, 20, and 30 year agreements as well as perpetual easements used to protect these wetlands after restoration.

If you are interested in restoring a wetland on your property please contact me at 920-485-3012.❖

# Prescribed Burning

By Tim Lizotte

The May wildfire near Los Alamos New Mexico brought prescribed burning to the forefront of national news. It caused the federal government to temporarily suspend the practice of prescribed burning and raised the question of whether the benefits justify the associated risks. Therefore, we thought this might be a good time to visit the concept of prescribed burning and it's importance as a wildlife management tool.

Prescribed burning objectives in the western U.S. differ greatly then those practiced in the central and eastern portions of the country. Western burns are often targeted at removing fuel loads under controlled conditions to prevent large and potentially disastrous wildfires. These burns may cover areas greater than 1,000 acres and involve heavy timber fuels. In contrast, our prescribed burning is aimed at improving habitat for wildlife, controlling woody brush and invasive plants, and preparing sites for habitat restoration. Our fuels are usually light grass and forbs and rarely cover more than 300 acres.

The most common type of burn we do is aimed at prairie maintenance. Most prairie plants are "warm season" adapted, meaning that they are dormant during the cold months and don't become active until late spring to summer. They have extensive root systems and can survive periods of drought and heat. Many weedy plants that invade our prairies are "cool season" adapted, such as annual bluegrass, brome grass and quack grass. Homeowners can relate to this as the bluegrass in their yards greens up in early spring and again in fall, yet turns crispy brown during the heat of summer. It is precisely these adaptations that make fire the tool of choice in prairie management.

A spring prairie fire kills actively growing cool season plants and burns off the existing grass and leaf litter, exposing the soil to the sun and allowing it to warm up quickly. This shortens the growing season for the cool season weeds and extends it for the warm season native plants. The fire does not damage prairie plants because their growing buds are protected beneath the soil surface. Additionally, fire returns potassium, phosphorus and other nutrients to the soil in the form of ash.

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After a fire the established prairie plants take advantage of the lack of competition and warm soil and begin growing upward. The net effect of fire is a rejuvenation of the prairie, with more plants germinating, flowering, and producing seed.

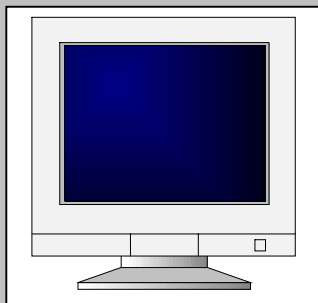
Prescribed burning does have some drawbacks. Fire can damage or destroy the nests of early nesting birds, reduce insect and small mammal populations, and if done at the wrong time can actually increase the amount of weed species in a prairie. For these reasons, areas are often burned in sections, leaving an unburned area to provide secure nest cover and reserve populations of insects and small mammals to repopulate the burned site. Burn plans are written that "prescribe" the specific conditions (temperature, humidity, wind speed/direction, time of year) under which the burn must be conducted to meet the specific management goals for the property. In addition, sites are visited periodically after the burn to determine whether the management goals were met, and if not then why. This allows biologists to continually learn about the complex relationships between fire and the plants and animals that depend on it.❖

## GHRA on the Web

The GHRA program is now on the Internet at:

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/hunt/hra.htm>

This site contains general information about the program, as well as an up to date list of the location of fee-title properties within the GHRA.



## GHRA Goals Revisited

By Tim Lizotte

Over the past 5 years many of the GHRA easement properties have been sold to new owners. There has been some confusion with new owners about the management rights and goals of the WDNR. Therefore, we thought it would be helpful to provide a review of the overall management strategies of the GHRA program.

The GHRA program was initiated in response to Wisconsin losing 99% of its grasslands and 50% of its wetlands since European settlement. This has led to the significant decline of 11 grassland and 22 wetland bird species. The GHRA program is a landscape scale approach to turn the clock back by restoring a patchwork of grasslands and wetlands over a large rural area so that wildlife can thrive side-by-side with agriculture. Therefore, our management goals focus on **grasslands** and **wetlands**, not forests. In fact, trees are detrimental to grassland birds because of the increased predation that is associated with the edges created by tree lines. Also, many grassland nesting birds will avoid areas with trees. This is why we have had to decline our easement holders' requests to plant trees.

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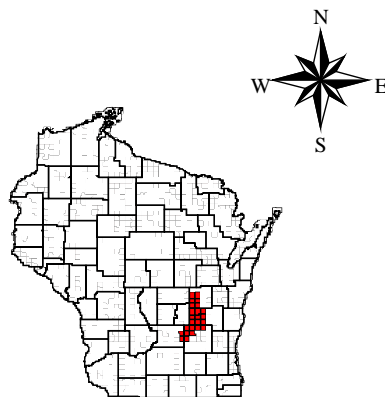
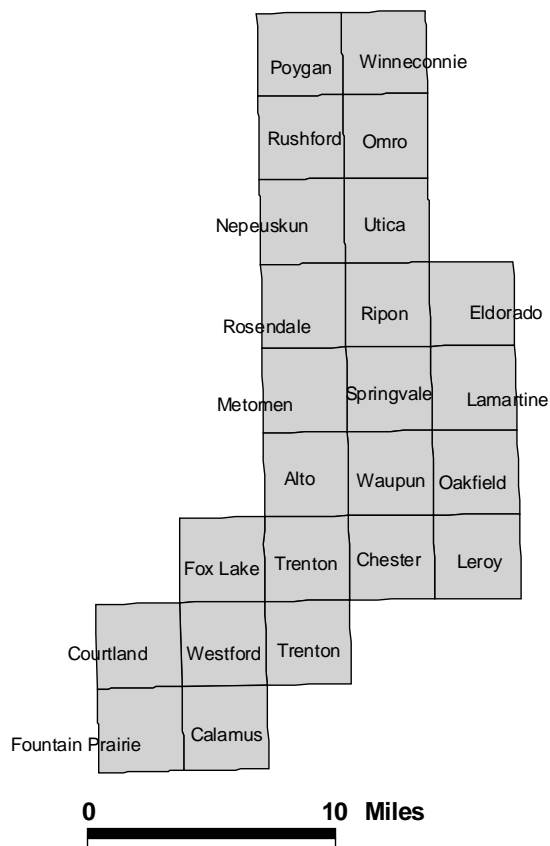
*The GHRA program is a landscape scale approach to turn the clock back by restoring a patchwork of grasslands and wetlands over a large rural area so that wildlife can thrive side-by-side with agriculture.*

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To accomplish our goals, the GHRA purchases land, acquires conservation easements, and cost-shares habitat projects. On our easement lands, the WDNR purchases the cropping and development rights to the property. Therefore, the landowner controls access to the property while the WDNR biologists manage the land in the best interest of grassland and wetland wildlife.

Farm land is often share-cropped for a few years and then restored to native prairie. Drained wetlands are restored to their original hydrology through a variety of methods. Tree lots are managed as oak savannah. The overall goals of the project are to restore 38,600 acres of grasslands and 11,000 acres of wetlands throughout the agricultural community of the area. Results of the GHRA acquisition efforts as of fall 1999 include 4,393 acres placed in perpetual easement and 6,380 acres in fee-title for a total of 10,773 acres. Of this land, 2,136 acres have been restored to native prairie and 637 acres to wetlands, with more conversion in progress. The objectives of this first of its kind, landscape scale effort in Wisconsin will not be achieved without the gracious willingness of many partners.❖

# Glacial Habitat Restoration Area and Staff



Eric Lobner  
Wildlife Biologist  
1210 N. Palmatory St.  
Horicon, WI 53032  
[lobnee@dnr.state.wi.us](mailto:lobnee@dnr.state.wi.us)

Brenda Hill  
Wildlife Biologist  
1210 N. Palmatory St.  
Horicon, WI 53032  
[hillb@dnr.state.wi.us](mailto:hillb@dnr.state.wi.us)

Tim Lizotte  
Wildlife Biologist  
625 E. County Rd. Y, Ste. 700  
Oshkosh, WI 54901-9731  
[lizott@dnr.state.wi.us](mailto:lizott@dnr.state.wi.us)

Brian Glenzinski  
Wetland Project Coordinator  
1210 N. Palmatory St.  
Horicon, WI 53032  
[glenzib@dnr.state.wi.us](mailto:glenzib@dnr.state.wi.us)

Department of Natural Resources  
Glacial Habitat Restoration Area Program  
1210 N. Palmatory Street  
Horicon, WI 53932